

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-10
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FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 141
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY NASSAU
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
USINT HAVANA
USIA WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SOPN, SHUM, PINT, JM
SUBJECT: INFORMATION MINISTER DEFINES GOVERNMENT'S
MEDIA POLICY

1. SUMMARY: ARNOLD BERTRAM, MINISTER OF STATE IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE FOR INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING, USED THE OCCASION OF A SPEECH BEFORE THE CARIBBEAN PUBLISHING AND BROADCASTING ASSOCIATION (CPBA) TO DELINEATE THE JAMAICAN GOVERNMENT'S POLICY TOWARD THE MEDIA. THE CPBA RESPONDED BY CRITICIZING BERTRAM FOR PRESENTING A LITANY OF "UNRESOLVED DOMESTIC DISPUTES". HOWEVER, BERTRAM'S SPEECH SHOULD PERHAPS HAVE GIVEN THEM GREATER CAUSE FOR CONCERN. END SUMMARY.

2. MINISTER OF STATE FOR INFORMATION ARNOLD "SCREE" BERTRAM WAS THE MAIN SPEAKER AT THE FINAL SESSION OF THE CPBA'S MARCH 3-4 MEETING IN KINGSTON. HE USED THE OCCASION TO SPEAK AT LENGTH ON "GOVERNMENT'S POLICY TOWARDS THE MEDIA",
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A SUBJECT WHICH HE DEALT WITH IN THREE PARTS. THEY WERE:

A. OWNERSHIP OF THE MEDIA -- THIS, SAID BERTRAM, SHOULD NOT BE IN THE HANDS OF NON-JAMAICANS ALTHOUGH HE STRESSED THAT "GOVERNMENT IS NOT AGAINST PRIVATE OWNERSHIP IN THE MEDIA AND WE HAVE NO INTENTION OF CHANGING THAT VIEW." HE WENT ON TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT SOME OF THOSE WHO MOST

STOUTLY DEFEND THEIR RIGHT TO OWN NEWSPAPERS AT THE SAME TIME "SUGGEST THAT THEY WOULD SEEK TO DENY THIS SAME RIGHT TO THOSE JAMAICANS WHO CANNOT SECURE FINANCIAL BACKING AND INFLUENTIAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS." BERTRAM ADDED THAT THE ADVERSE RESPONSE TO MORE BROADLY-BASED OWNERSHIP HAS FORCED HIM TO ASK: "ARE THE PEOPLE OF JAMAICA TO EXPECT MORE DEMOCRACY, MORE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, MORE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FROM A HANDFUL OF PRIVATE, FOREIGN OWNERS AND THEIR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES THAN FROM A BROAD-BASED REPRESENTATION OF THE NATIONAL INTEREST?"

B. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEDIA -- REFERRING TO A SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER MANLEY, BERTRAM SAID THAT THE JAMAICAN GOVERNMENT HOLDS THAT "TRUE PRESS FREEDOM INVOLVES AT LEAST A MODICUM OF BALANCE IN THE DISSEMINATION OF NEWS AND THE EXPRESSION OF OPINIONS AND THAT NO DEMOCRACY CAN EXIST IN A CLIMATE IN WHICH NARROW, SECTORAL INTERESTS DOMINATE LARGE SECTIONS OF THE MEDIA." IN JAMAICA, DEMOCRACY IS BEING DEEPENED BY "WORKER PARTICIPATION" AND IN THE MEDIA THIS WILL MEAN THAT "PROFESSIONAL MEDIA WORKERS ... HAVE THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE MAJOR DECISION MAKING PROCESS WHICH AFFECTS FUNDAMENTALLY THE OUTPUT OF THE MEDIA..."

C. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MEDIA --" ... THE GOVERNMENT HAS A DUTY IN THE NAME OF ... FREEDOM OF THE PRESS TO SEE THAT OUTLETS ARE PROVIDED FOR ADEQUATE UNCLASSIFIED

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EXPRESSION OF OPINIONS AND VIEWS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE PEOPLE." BERTRAM THEN NOTED THAT THE COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY SET UP TO CONSIDER THE DISPUTE AT THE "DAILY NEWS" HAD CONCLUDED THAT WHILE THE INVESTOR HAS A RIGHT TO DETERMINE AND MONITOR A NEWSPAPER'S POLICIES," ... PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS (HAVE A RIGHT) TO INFLUENCE IN KEEPING WITH THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MEDIA." BUT, HE ADDED, " ACTIONS TAKEN THAT DERIVE FROM OWNERSHIP OF THE PROPERTY MUST NOT BE CONFUSED WITH ACTION TAKEN TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.

3. BERTRAM'S SPEECH WAS LENGTHY, AND A PORTION OF IT WAS GIVEN TO CRITICISM OF THE PRIVATELY-OWNED MEDIA FOR THEIR LABOR PRACTICES. THE MINISTER OF STATE STATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS THE CREATION OF ORGANIZATIONS OF MEDIA WORKERS IN ORDER TO PROMOTE WORKER PARTICIPATION. THUS, ANY ACT WHICH WEAKENS THESE ORGANIZATIONS, "WHICH SMACKS OF UNION-BUSTING", IS UNACCEPTABLE. HE CITED THE LAY-OFFS BY THE "PRIVATE MEDIA" OVER THE LAST YEAR -- 180 -- BUT WITHOUT DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE GLEANER COMPANY'S PAPERS AND THE "DAILY NEWS". HE THEN ALLEGED THAT THE NEWSPAPERS (AND LEFT HIS LISTENERS TO CONCLUDE EASILY

THAT HE MEANT "THE GLEANER" AND "THE STAR") HAD ADOPTED A
PRACTICE OF DISCHARGING THE "MOST PROFESSIONAL", THE
"SENIOR JOURNALISTS", THE "BEST REPRESENTATIVES OF THE WORKERS".

4. COMMENT: THE CPBA'S REACTION TO BERTRAM'S SPEECH WAS
SHARP. IT SAID THAT HAVING ASKED BERTRAM TO EXPLAIN THE
GOVERNMENT'S MEDIA POLICY, HE HAD USED THE OCCASION
"FOR AN INAPPROPRIATE ATTACK ON PRIVATELY-OWNED MEDIA
IN JAMAICA" AND HAD "LARGELY DEALT WITH MINUTE
DETAILS OF UNRESOLVED DOMESTIC DISPUTES".
HAVERKAMP

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